

FERGUSON, FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT, SWITZERLAND, VOLTAIRE¹

“Vous n’avez certainement pu méconnaître à quel point les Hume, les Ferguson, les Adam Smith ... ressemblent intellectuellement à des français”, J. S. Mill to A. Comte, letter 44, le 5 octobre 1844, in *Collected Works of J. S. Mill*, vol. XIII, p. 638;

“les écossais, chez qui l’éducation publique a un caractère plus français qu’anglais, ce qui explique le mérite éminent des penseurs écossais depuis Kames et Ferguson jusqu’à mon père qui mort en 1836, fut le dernier survivant de cette grande école,” *ibid.*, 28 Jan. 1843, vol. XIII, p. 566.

See M. Malherbe, on Royer-Collard dissatisfied with the materialism of Condillac, and who comes across Thomas Reid (in Brodie, *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 298).

This essay aims at clarifying the complex problem of the relations between Ferguson and the French culture of the Eighteenth Century. The subject does not seem to have been fortunate in historiography, at least, if compared with the traditional, historiographic topic, of 'Ferguson in Germany'.² This omission needs to be rectified. The works of Ferguson certainly enjoyed a favourable reception in Germany, where they were immediately translated and widely read;³ the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* proved especially to have much to say to German culture and to social science, which was there in embryo. At the same time they were translated into the principal European languages. The *Essay* appeared in French in 1783,⁴ and in Italian in 1791-2;⁵ the *Institutes* respectively in 1775⁶ and 1790;⁷ the *Roman Republic* in 1784-91⁸ and in 1793-4.⁹ This proves, once more, the cultural unity of Europe, which the Protestant Reformation only partially had torn.

The traditional historical ties between Britain and Germany favoured the reception of the Scottish historians, and of Ferguson in particular. Hanover was, in fact, the place of origin of the British dynasty, the Hanoverians, and Prussia had been their natural ally in the Seven Years War, and was to be, again, during the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

The good reception which we find in Germany was not matched later by a corresponding one in Scotland, for the works of Schiller, Herder, Kant, etc., which were scarcely influential, and Ferguson, in his *Correspondence*,¹⁰ shows no particular interest in the German culture of his time; by contrast, he is enthusiastic about King Frederick the Great, the Duke of Brunswick, the Earl Marischal Keith, etc., and, in general, for the military valour of the Prussians.

¹ This paper was delivered at the university of Grenoble, on 6-9 July 1996.

² On this subject see F. Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment. Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1995).

³ The *Essay* as *Versuch über die Geschichte der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1768); the *Institutes* as *Grundsätze der Moralphilosophie* (Leipzig, 1772); the *Roman Republic* as *Geschichte des Fortgangs und Untergangs der Römischen Republik* (Leipzig, 1784-86).

⁴ *Essai sur l'histoire de la société civile*, par M. Adam Fergusson (Paris, 1783).

⁵ *Saggio sopra la Storia della Società. Civile*, di Adamo Ferguson (Vicenza, 1791-2).

⁶ *Institutions de Philosophie Morale* (Genève, 1775).

⁷ *Istituzioni di Filosofia Morale del Sig. Fergusson* (Venezia, 1790).

⁸ *Histoire des Progrès et de la Chûte de la République Romaine* (Paris, vols 1-3, 1784; vols 4-7, 1791).

⁹ *Ricerche Storiche e Critiche su le Cause dei Progressi e del Decadimento della Repubblica Romana* (Venezia, 1793-4).

¹⁰ A. Ferguson, *Correspondence*, edited by V. Merolle, 2 vols (London, 1995).

But France, with its geographic contiguity, must necessarily have exerted a particular influence on British culture. Paris, the centre of European Enlightenment, was just 'across the channel', and I contend that French, after all, although a language of Romance origin, for a British scholar was much more understandable than German. In fact, one must consider that the official language of university teaching in Scotland had been Latin (especially relevant for the study of Roman Law) still during the first half of the century,¹¹ and the vocabulary of English historical and philosophical writing was, and is, of Romance origin, now only in part modified by the influence of American-English.

The influence of Montesquieu had been preponderating since the appearance of the *Esprit des Lois*, and was probably enhanced by the eulogy of the 'Constitution d'Angleterre'- this is the title of the most celebrated chapter of the book,¹² which must have met, for this very reason, the appreciation of the Hanoverian establishment.

Although young Scots used to study Roman Law mostly at Leyden and Groningen, France was the natural destination of the Scottish *intelligentsia*. Hume had been there, at La Flèche in Anjou, in 1734-7, and again, in Paris, in 1763-6; Adam Smith spent there two years in 1764-5, having frequent and useful intercourse with the French 'économistes', who were a main source of inspiration for the *Wealth of Nations*.

Apart from these reasons, cultural and philosophical reasons need to be duly considered, in order to understand the problem of the reception of the works of Ferguson, both in France and in Germany. The *Essay* is an early intimation of Historicism and Romanticism,¹³ and, when it was published, in 1767, although Romantic literature was not a novelty -Macpherson's *Fingal* had appeared in 1762, *Temora* in 1763- yet, from a philosophical point of view, its author was certainly a precursor. Enlightenment was then in its full maturity, and the cultural climate was not favourable to a good reception of an *historicist* work. This substantially explains Hume's criticism of the *Essay*.¹⁴

Furthermore, the *Institutes* was translated into German by Christian Garve (1772) as an educational book, while, for a full appreciation of the work of Ferguson, especially of the *Essay*, one must wait until Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), who was a Romantic and Liberal, and an opponent of German Enlightenment.

As for the French reception of the *Essay*, the judgement of Baron d'Holbach, contained in a letter to Ferguson, of 15 June 1767, is illuminating.¹⁵ This letter is not surprising, considering what has been said above, concerning the cultural relations between France and Great Britain. Hume and Smith, on their part, had almost been Ferguson's ambassadors in Paris, especially Hume, a favourite in the Parisian saloons.¹⁶

Hume was in friendly terms with d'Holbach, who had warned him against Rousseau,¹⁷ had undertaken to furnish a house for him,¹⁸ and apparently translated into French the essays *Of Suicide*

¹¹ For example, in Professor Stevenson's class of Logic, in which prize essays were entered from 1737 to 1751, about half were written in Latin, and the other half in English. Latin survived longest in the Faculty of Medicine, where theses were composed solely in that language until 1833 (see D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh 1556-1889* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 47).

¹² Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, XI, 6. On this subject see particularly L. Landi, *L'Inghilterra e il pensiero politico di Montesquieu* (Padova, 1981).

¹³ On this subject see particularly F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, in two vols (Berlin and Munich, 1936), sechstes Kapitel, 'Die Englische Präromantik', II, 'Ferguson', pp. 281-88.

See also D. Forbes, who writes that the *Essay* "belongs... to a number of histories or pre-histories: sociology, romanticism, Historismus..... it certainly does not belong to the history of the idea of progress" ('Introduction' to the *Essay*, Edinburgh, 1966, p. XIV).

¹⁴ *HL*, vol. II, pp. 11-12, Hume to Hugh Blair, 11 February 1766. On this subject see D. Raynor, 'Why did David Hume dislike Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*?', in *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society*, E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2009), pp. 45-72, and V. Merolle, 'Hume as critic of Ferguson's *Essay*', *ibid.*, pp. 73-87.

¹⁵ Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, pp. 77-8, letter 54.

¹⁶ See particularly Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, pp. 51-3, Hume to Ferguson, letter 35, dated Fontainebleau, 9 November 1763.

¹⁷ See *HL*, vol. II, p. 13n.

and *Of the Immortality of the Soul*.¹⁹ While Hume was in London, where he had returned, in January 1766, with Rousseau,²⁰ Smith was in Paris in the summer of the same year, himself on kind terms with d'Holbach, whose name occurs in his correspondence of this period, and who no doubt invited him to dine in his house in the rue Royale.²¹

In his letter d'Holbach, in reply to a letter by Ferguson, dated 3 March 1767, assured his correspondent that he had found the *Essay* "answering completely to the high opinion I had conceived of your great abilities and ingenuity, by the testimonies given of you by Mr. Andrew Stewart, Colonel Clerk, and several other gentlemen from your country", who may possibly have included Hume and Smith among them. Then he acutely observed that, although Ferguson did not seem "to set a high value on theory", yet "it must necessarily precede practice".²²

This means that theory, or the 'raison', must 'enlighten' the 'practice', i.e. the history. In other words, d'Holbach had well realized that the *secret substratum* of the *Essay* was not the philosophy of Enlightenment, but the philosophy of Historicism,²³ and that this contrasted, at least in part, with his own philosophical and political theory.

Nevertheless, he continued to allege that this was "given" in Ferguson's "grand performance", and that it, "by enlightening the human mind, may contribute to render their practice better". In fact, d'Holbach did not despair of the "perfectibility of mankind", and the *Essay* "is, and will be, very able to dispel the fogs that hang over our understanding", although many "think it their interest to keep mankind in the dark". Last, he added that the virtues that preserve nations "must be the effect of learning", and morality shall be rescued "from the hands of those who have made it their study to render it obscure".

It is not easy to maintain that d'Holbach's interpretation of the contents of the *Essay* is adequate, especially if considering that he particularly emphasized the "enlightened" point of view, which is not exactly Ferguson's point of view. Nor can one simply affirm, as Ernest C. Mossner did, that in the *Essay* we particularly find "the insistence upon the inevitability of progress, upon the principle of perfection", adding that "these doctrines Hume had repudiated in the 'philosophes'; it is thus no coincidence that the 'philosophes', for their part, approved of Ferguson".²⁴ It is rather true that, in the *Essay*, "whatever is, is natural"; and that "instinct and habit, not reason and calculation create social form".²⁵

Therefore the 'philosophes', i.e. essentially d'Holbach, approved of Ferguson's reasoning, although the limits of this approval need a thorough examination. In reality it seems to be rather general, lacking a specific content. D'Holbach, after all, as I have indicated above, prevails upon the *Essay*'s true meaning, in order to emphasize his own philosophy, but the extent of his 'approval' remains vague.

One kind of explanation can be given. The *Essay* is in line with eighteenth-century Historicism, and its author is a precursor of Romanticism and Liberalism, but, of what kind of Romanticism? Certainly not of the religious Romanticism of Chateaubriand, Lamennais, De Maistre, De Bonald, Manzoni, etc., but of a quite areligious one. Romanticism is, in fact, a political and literary movement, which finds its philosophical justification in Historicism. Historicism, nevertheless, is a quite comprehensive movement, in which different tendencies find their place. Ferguson's Historicism ignores any idea of religion, which is alien to the *Essay*, its author deriving

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 118.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 346.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 1.

²¹ See Smith, *Correspondence*, edited by E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1987), particularly pp. 113, 119, 295n.

²² Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, pp. 77-8.

²³ I have developed these problems in my *Saggio su Ferguson. Con un Saggio su Millar* (Roma, 1994). On it see review by D.D. Raphael, in *Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, No. 9, Spring 1995, pp. 24-5.

²⁴ E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1980), p. 543.

²⁵ W. A. Dunning, *A History of Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer* (New York, 1920), pp. 66-8.

exemplification mostly from classical antiquity, in part from the literature on the savage, almost none at all from the history of Christianity.²⁶

The consideration of the real attitude of Ferguson towards revealed religion can be of help, from this point of view. In the letter to Adam Smith, dated Groningen 1754,²⁷ Ferguson, then thirty-one years old, asked Smith to write to him "without any clerical titles, for I am a downright layman". In consequence of the publication of the *Morality of Stage Plays*, he was called, in an anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Players Scourge*, an "avowed deist, play-hunter, and companion to the wicked.... a vile blasphemer and maligner of our Lord and his apostles".²⁸ His sharing in the ideology of the Moderate Party is indicative of his philosophical and political ideas. Lastly, a biographical detail, concerning his last years, helps to explain his philosophical opinions. In a letter to Lord Melville, dated 20 August 1799, concerning the office of Principal of the University of St Andrews, George Hill observed that it would have been superfluous to make any offer to Ferguson, who 'has, I am afraid, too great an aversion to the Church to accept of an office which would require him to resume the dress and the station of a Clergyman: he might have an Assistant, indeed, to do the duty of the small Parish of St Leonard, which, for more than a Century, has gone along with the principality'.²⁹ And, in fact, having been consulted, Ferguson declined.³⁰

The conclusion seems to be that d'Holbach certainly appreciated immanentism as one of the essential characteristics of the *Essay*, whose ideas, nevertheless, do not fully, or exclusively, belong to the Enlightenment.³¹

The other element to be considered is the idea of progress,³² which plays a conspicuous part in the *Essay*, although, as we have seen, it is far from being its most distinctive character.

The *Essay* opens with the following words: "Natural productions are generally formed by degrees. Vegetables grow from a tender shoot, and animals from an infant state. The latter being destined to act, extend their operations as their powers increase: they exhibit a progress in what they perform, as well as in the faculties they acquire. This progress in the case of man is continued to a greater extent than in that of any other animal. Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization".³³

These words must have struck d'Holbach's attention, winning his approval for the work. They were evidently considered, by the French 'philosophes', as the *Essay's* most relevant character, as offering a thorough philosophical explanation for it, and this was not disputed for a long time,

²⁶ According to G. L. McDowell, "his reticence, or rather his severely limited criticism of his faith, is no doubt attributable to a prudent regard for the spirit of his age and his own well-being..... F. willingly laid upon the altar of his faith a great part of the responsibility for the decay of the human spirit in modern times. Christianity, like commerce, had gone so far in dousing the flame of spirit that burned so brightly in rude times" (G. L. McDowell, 'Commerce, Virtue and Politics: Adam Ferguson's Constitutionalism', *Review of Politics*, vol. 45 (Oct. 1983), pp. 536-552).

²⁷ Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 10, letter 3.

²⁸ J. B. Fagg, 'Biographical Introduction', in Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. XXVIII.

²⁹ Saint Andrews, 20 August 1799, National Library of Scotland, Melville Papers, MS 8, f. 21.

³⁰ Robert Dundas of Arniston to Henry Dundas, Melville Castle, 17 October 1799; National Library of Scotland, Melville Papers, MS 8, f. 37. These letters have been brought to my attention by Michael Fry. On these problems see also Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. II, pp. 544-5, Appendix C.

³¹ "Frei vom Zwang zu religiös-politischem Konformismus", defines the *Essay* Hans Medick (see Ferguson, *Versuch über die Geschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Zwi Batscha und Hans Medick (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), p. 20).

³² On this subject see J. Delvaille, *Essay sur l'Histoire de l'Idée de Progrès, jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIème Siècle* (Paris 1930), livre VII, Chap. III, 'Adam Ferguson', pp. 473 ff. Delvaille's ideas are disputable. By contrast, according to D. Forbes, the *Essay* "certainly does not belong to the history of the idea of progress..... Ferguson is describing a process of social evolution which, if it brings with it liberty secured by law and ordered government, brings also evils which threaten to sap the foundations of this achievement" (D. Forbes, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 'Introduction', p. XIV).

On the idea of progress see also J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress. An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920); A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936); D. Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1990).

³³ *Essay*, part first, Sect. I, p. 1.

finding their place, lastly, in E. C. Mossner's evaluation of Ferguson's work.³⁴ Nevertheless, far from missing the point at issue, as I have indicated above, d'Holbach had acutely observed that its author did not set "a high value on theory".

It is clear that, for a full reception of Ferguson's *Essay* in France, one must read, early the next century, the works of Benjamin Constant, a writer Romantic, Historicist and Liberal, and the works of Alexis de Tocqueville. In his early youth Constant spent a period in Edinburgh, in 1783-4 and, although, in his *Cahier Rouge*,³⁵ he dedicated only a few lines to this period, yet in his works Fergusonian concepts recur often *verbatim*.³⁶

As for Tocqueville, there is no direct influence of Ferguson upon him, yet he expresses a quite similar political ethics, in the line from Montesquieu to modern liberal theories.³⁷

Along with the problem of the reception of the works of Ferguson in France, the opposite problem must be considered, i.e., that of Ferguson's reception of French culture. This helps explain the cultural history of Europe in eighteenth century to the present times, and the background of the works of the Scottish philosopher, especially of the *Essay*, which is his most relevant and lasting production.

This is based mainly on classical sources, and it cannot be surprising, considering the relevance of classical culture in Europe during the century of the Enlightenment, a point which needs to be emphasized.

Not to say more on this subject, in 1742, twenty four years before the appearance of the *Essay*, Francis Hutcheson still published in Latin his *Metaphysicae Synopsis and Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*.

Therefore written French, if not spoken French, a language of Latin and Romance origin, was largely understandable to British scholars, while German was not so. And, in fact, we find in Hume, Smith, Ferguson, attempts at writing words and sentences in French, mostly in poor French,³⁸ never in German. The similarity, at least in part, of the language, and especially of the historical and philosophical vocabulary, is the main reason why French literature is well known to

³⁴ Mossner, op. cit. Apart from Meinecke's work, cited above, in this context deserving particular mention is W. Ch. Lehmann, who maintains that Ferguson must be considered, "in matters of particular policy, a moderate liberal; sometimes, like Burke, a philosophical conservative" (see W. Ch. Lehmann, *Adam Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Sociology* (New York, 1930), p. 45). D. Kettler considers the Scottish philosopher as "a strong supporter of the social status quo" (D. Kettler, *The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Ohio State Univ. Press, 1965), p. 160), while Hermann Huth emphasizes, in Ferguson, the ethics of the "Freiheit des Individuums" and the refusal of the "rational-individualen Vorstellungen" (H. Huth, *Soziale und Individualistische Auffassung im 18ten Jahrhundert, vornehmlich bei Adam Smith und Adam Ferguson. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Soziologie* (Leipzig, 1907), p. 17 and p. 62).

On these problems see now V. Merolle, *Saggio su Ferguson*, op. cit., chap. II, 'L'Idea di Progresso', pp. 15-24.

³⁵ See B. Constant, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1957), pp. 126-7.

³⁶ On these problems see my *Saggio su Ferguson*, op. cit., passim. See furthermore, here, on the internet, the paper *Adam Ferguson. Liberalism, Republicanism, Marxism*.

³⁷ Again, see my *Saggio su Ferguson*, passim.

To understand Ferguson's political philosophy and its meaning, cp., e.g., the *Essay*, ed. D. Forbes (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 44-5, and B. Croce, the 'philosopher of liberty', 'Libertà e Giustizia', in *Discorsi di Varia Filosofia*, in two vols (Bari, 1959), vol. I, pp. 270-3, passim. The same concepts recur *verbatim* in the two philosophers, when they outline the ethics of moral and political activity.

³⁸ See, for example, the reference to the "Duchess d'Enville, who complained of your French, as she did of mine", in Ferguson, *Correspondence*, I, p. 111, Ferguson to Adam Smith, letter dated Geneva, June 1st, 1774. See, furthermore, *HL, Smith's Correspondence, Ferguson's Correspondence*, passim.

As for Ferguson, just once, in his letters, he mentions German words, the adverbs 'Gleich & Geschwind' (erroneously spelt in capital initial), in *Correspondence*, vol. II, p. 354, letter no. 283, to Sir John Macpherson, dated Frankfurt, 25 Sept. 1793.

them, although one must consider that the great German literature appears late in the century, with Historicism and Romanticism, and largely draws on British authors.³⁹

The background of the *Essay*, apart from the fundamental role of classical sources, especially Caesar and Tacitus, is the travel literature, and this is written in French and in English, as a consequence of the history of these nations, which had both expanded to North-America and to India. Germany, by contrast, was no more a united nation, after the peace of Westfalia (1648), and Prussia, for geographic reasons, was a continental power. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the official language of the Court of Berlin was French, and Frederick II, who considered German as rough and not suitable for literature, wrote in French his books, apparently Voltaire being his reviser, at least concerning some of them.⁴⁰

The above-said reasons sufficiently explain why no German author is mentioned by Ferguson, either in his works or in the *Correspondence*.⁴¹

Ferguson generally cites the French authors from English translations, which were then frequent, with some inevitable exceptions.⁴²

As for the *Essay*, apart from Montesquieu and Rousseau, omnipresent in the British historical and philosophical literature of this period, he draws first of all on Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix (1682-1761), whose *Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle France* had appeared in 1744. He cites it (part I, sect. III, p. 18n) as the *History of Canada*, probably from the *Journal of a Voyage to North-America. Undertaken by order of the French King. Containing the geographical description and natural history of that country, particularly Canada*. Translated from the French of P. de Charlevoix. In two volumes (London, 1761).

Another French author of travel literature cited is Jean Chardin (1643-1713) (part II, sect. III, p. 103n), author of the *Journal* (1686). His work is referred to as *Travels*, apparently from *The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East-India* (London, 1686), or even from *A New and Accurate Description of Persia and Other Eastern Nations* (London, 1724).

The work by Joseph François Lafitau (?-1740), *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Paris, 1723, 2 vols), is cited as *Moeurs des Sauvages*, both in the *Essay* (part I, sect. I, p. 8n) and in the *Principles* (vol. I, p. 60). No English translation appears either in the British Library catalogue, in the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland, or in the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC). The work apparently had not been translated, and Ferguson could read the French edition, although with some difficulty.

Simon de St Quintin (cited in *Essay*, part II, sect. III, p. 102n) a Dominican, sent by Pope Innocent IV to Tartary in 1247, wrote a *Historia Tartarorum*. Ferguson apparently cites him from the French edition, after Vincent, Père de Beauvais.

The other French authors cited in the *Essay* are the following ones:

1) Laurent d'Arvieux (1635-1702) (p. 113n), author of a *Relation d'un voyage fait par ordre de Louis XIV vers le Grand Emir*; of the *Traité des mœurs et coutumes des Arabes*, both published

³⁹ On this subject see particularly N. Waszek, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of Civil Society* (Dordrecht, 1988).

⁴⁰ See Ferguson, *Correspondence*, I, p. 116 and 118n., Ferguson to William Robertson, dated Geneva Novr 9th 1774, for King Frederick's *Histoire de la Guerre de Sept Ans*.

⁴¹ The only exception is Philip von Strahlenberg, whose *An Historico-Geographical Description of the Northern and Eastern Parts of Europe and Asia* had been translated into English in 1738. He is cited in *Essay*, part III, sect. IV, p. 142.

⁴² See on this point also Jane B. Fagg, 'Ferguson's Use of the Edinburgh University Library: 1764-1806', in E. Heath-V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2008), pp. 39-64.

posthumously in 1717. His *Mémoires* was published in 1735, but none of his books was apparently translated into English. As in the case of John Chardin, Ferguson could draw from *A new and complete collection of voyages and travels: comprising whatever is valuable of this kind in the most celebrated English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Swedish, and Danish writers* (London, 1760). This work is cited in *Essay*, part III, sect. IV, p. 139.

2) Jean François Paul de Gondî (1614-1679), Cardinal de Retz. His *Mémoires* had been published in 1717. They are cited as *Memoirs* (part III, sect. II, p. 122n), apparently from the *Memoirs* of the Cardinal de Retz (London, 1723).

3) Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1689-1759), whose *Essai de Philosophie Morale* had been published in 1749. It is cited as *Essai de Morale* (part I, sect. VII, p. 41n), directly from the French edition.

4) Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771), *De l'Esprit* (Paris, 1758), cited (part I, sect. I, p. 5n; see also *Principles*, vol. II, p. 72n) as *Traité de l'Esprit*. It is apparently cited from the French edition, although an English edition had appeared as *De l'Esprit: or essays on the mind and its several faculties*. Written by Helvétius, translated from the edition printed under the author's inspection (Oxford and Cambridge, 1759).

The works of Montesquieu had been translated into English soon after their appearance. The *Réflexions sur les Causes de la Grandeur et de la Décadence des Romains* had appeared in an English edition the same year of their publication (London, 1734), and in later editions at Glasgow-Dundee-Edinburgh in 1752, at Glasgow in 1758, in London again in 1759. *De l'Esprit des Lois* (1748), in the translation by Thomas Nugent (London, 1750), went through several editions (see, e.g., the edition Aberdeen, 1756; Berwick, 1770; Edinburgh, 1768, 1772, 1773).

Of the works of Rousseau, Ferguson cites the *Discours* as *Sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (1755) (in part I, sect. I, p. 5n, and p. III, sect. I, p. 118), apparently from the original edition. This work had been translated into English as *A discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality among mankind*. By John James Rousseau (London, 1761).

In the *Institutes*, (3rd ed., Edinburgh, 1785), apart from Charlevoix and Montesquieu, Ferguson cites Buffon (p. 17, 22n), Hénault (p. 159n), La Bruyère (p. 238n).

As for George Louis Leclerc Buffon (1707-1788), his *Histoire Naturelle* (1749, 1753-67) was published in London in an English translation in 1775, as *The Natural History of Animals, Vegetables and Minerals*, and in Edinburgh, in 1780, as *Natural History, General and Particular*. Ferguson cites it as *Natural History*, from the English translation.

The *Nouvel Abrégé Chronologique de l'Histoire de France* (Paris, 1744), by Charles-Jean-François Hénault (1685-1770), was translated into English as *A New Chronological Abridgement of the History of France* (London, 1762). Ferguson cites it as *Abregé de l'Histoire de France, fin du règne de Henry IV*. This probably means that he was using the French edition.

The *Caractères de Théophraste* (Paris, 1687), by Jean de la Bruyère (1644-1696), had passed through several English editions, and, lately, in a Dublin edition (1776), and in the edition of *The Works* (London, 1776). Ferguson cites them as *Maxims of La Bruyère*.

In the *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (Edinburgh, 1792), apart from Buffon, Charlevoix, Hénault, Helvétius, La Bruyère, Lafitau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, cited in the previous works, and short references to Descartes, Lavoisier, Pascal, Racine, Voltaire, the other French authors cited are Bassompierre, Buffier, La Rochefoucauld.

François de Bassompierre (1579-1646), Maréchal de France, was the author of the *Mémoires*, published in 1665. Since no English translation appeared until 1819, probably Ferguson cited it (Vol. II., p. 75) from a French edition. He could, nevertheless, draw from a secondary source.

Claude, père Buffier (1661-1737) published his *Cours de Sciences sur des Principes Nouveaux et Simples pour former le Langage, l'Esprit et le Coeur*, in 1732. His work influenced the Scottish philosophers, and is credited with founding the philosophy of common sense. No English translation appears, nevertheless, in the bibliographical sources. Therefore Ferguson, apparently, cites it (vol. II, p. 27) directly from the French edition.

François, Duc de la Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), was the author of the *Mémoires* (1662) and of the *Réflexions, ou Sentences et Maximes Morales* (1665). They passed through several English editions, and clearly were well known to Ferguson, who repeatedly refers to them (vol. II, pp. 41, 333, 339).

If the bibliographical references give a clear insight into the sources of Ferguson and his culture, no less relevant, from this point of view, is the biography of the author. His continuous referring, in the *Correspondence*, to literary sources, is further proof of what has been said above, concerning the background of his works and the European culture of the second half of the eighteenth century. And yet Ferguson, during the whole of his life, seems to have had virtually no opportunity of visiting France, with the exception of 'a few days in Paris', in May or June 1774.⁴³

His earliest letter concerning that country, is dated 1 December 1754.⁴⁴ Writing from Leipzig to Adam Smith, he informed his correspondent of the state of the university there, explaining that "the publick lectures are in German & Strangers are obliged to have private lessons in Latin". He added that Leipzig was not "a place of conversation" to him, and that he could express himself "through the Medium of bad Latin & bad French".⁴⁵ Furthermore, he lodged with a Frenchman⁴⁶ "for the sake of learning his Language".

The most lively interest, in the letter, appears when its author tells Smith stories concerning French writers, stories which he has heard about.

Fontenelle, for example, as he was described by a Gentleman who "passed some days ago in his way from Paris to Berlin", at the age of almost one hundred years being still a philanderer, full of sense of humour towards the Parisian ladies.

Concerning Voltaire, Ferguson had lately seen "some Smart letters in Manuscript that Passed between [him], & a Church Man of Dignitee in France on account of his Infidelity". He added, "They say he is Constantly Complaining of his Health & threatening to Die", a recurring topic, indeed, in his behaviour.⁴⁷ Furthermore, "a Lady here tells me she saw him in his way from Berlin, & that he caressed one of her Children & said he woud be fond of him even if he had been begotten by Maupertuis".⁴⁸

Two years after writing this letter, we find Ferguson in Holland, at Groningen,⁴⁹ in his capacity as tutor to John Fletcher Campbell, Lord Milton's son. It is interesting to observe that they lodged in the house of Jean Abraham Le Moine,⁵⁰ teacher of French, and that their address was "Au Parlement d'Angleterre a (sic!) Groningue,⁵¹ or "A Monsr Le Moine Maitre (sic!) de Langues a (sic!) Groninguen by Holland".⁵²

Apart from those mentioned above, we find, in the letters of the early period, no references to France.

The Seven Years War was to break out not long after, causing, apparently, an interruption in Ferguson's interest for French culture. His letters of this period reflect, in fact, the preoccupation for military events, and especially for the impending danger of an invasion on the part of the neighbouring power.

⁴³ See Ferguson, *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 118 and n., letter 73.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, vol. I, pp. 11-12, letter 4.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 11.

⁴⁶ I.e., with Eléazar de Mauvillon, who translated into French Hume's *Political Discourses* (1754).

⁴⁷ See *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 116, letter 72.

⁴⁸ While in Berlin, Voltaire had issued against Maupertuis the satire *Le Docteur Akakia, Médecin du Pape*, ridiculing him, but King Frederick intervened personally in support of Maupertuis, and he was forced to leave.

⁴⁹ He had already been there in 1754, before moving to Leipzig (see *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 11).

⁵⁰ *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 14, letter 6, dated Groningen October 4th 1756.

⁵¹ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 17, letter 7.

⁵² Ibidem, vol. I, p. 18., letter 8.

On 12 July 1759, writing from London, he expressed to John Home his "trust to the Fleet while the season keeps moderate weather & will allow our Ships to ly on the Ennemys Coast".⁵³ By September, he added, "we expect troops from Gibraltar &c &c those who are at Home compleated enough to repell a French embarkation". The same day he reassured Lord Milton, telling him that "the people here are not much alarmed with the French Invasion even People who allow it practicable have no impression of its consequence".⁵⁴

On 14 September, the subject of the invasion occurred once more, in a letter to Gilbert Elliot.⁵⁵ The French had been defeated, a few weeks earlier, on 1 August, in the second battle of Minden, by the Prussians, under the command of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, and the French fleet of Admiral La Clue at Lagos, on 19 August, by Admiral Boscawen.

Although the danger had abated, Ferguson still spoke of the possibility of an invasion on the part of Maréchal de Contades, who "had planned an embarkation from the Weser and the Elb when they shoud become Masters of these Rivers, a stroke which woud have probably surprised us in the North". The remedy was, of course, that of a militia for Scotland.

But the war was not to last forever, and voices of negotiation became more insistent. On 10 November 1761⁵⁶ we find the philosopher reading a pamphlet, borrowed from Lord Milton, regarding the negotiation which had taken place in Spring-Summer. Finally, in September 1762, when he could inform Lord Milton that his son, Captain Fletcher Campbell, was going to France, accompanying the Duke of Bedford, the horizon was in sight.⁵⁷ The Duke, in fact, had been appointed ambassador to treat for peace, and was to sign the definitive treaty at Paris, on 10 February 1763.

Both the references to historical events, and the literary ones prove that Ferguson's interest in French culture was constant and lasted all his life.

For example, writing to David Hume, on 26 November 1763, he mentioned Pangloss, a character in Voltaire's tale *Candide ou l'optimisme*.⁵⁸ He used the expression "Le docteur tant pis tant mieux", apparently having in mind Molière's plays *Le malade imaginaire* and *Le médecin malgré lui*.⁵⁹ He had read the *Vie de l'Empereur Julien*, by the Abbé de la Bletterie.⁶⁰ In a letter to Gen. Fletcher Campbell, dated 17 June 1786, he mentioned Panurge, a character in Rabelais's *Pantagruel*.⁶¹ Andrew Stuart, writing to him, on 4 June 1798,⁶² mentioned Le Sage, whose masterpiece, *Gil Blas*, had been translated into English, in 1747, by Tobias Smollett.

XXX XXX XXX

The second part of this essay regards French Switzerland and Voltaire and, on the basis of some letters, aims at throwing new light upon the biography of the 'apostle' of irreligiosity.

Ferguson had gone to Geneva as tutor to the 5th Earl of Chesterfield. From there, he wrote to his Edinburgh friends, to Adam Smith, on 1 June 1774,⁶³ to David Hume on 6 June,⁶⁴ to William

⁵³ Ibidem, vol. II, p. 33, letter 19.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 35, letter 20.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, vol. II, p. 37-8, letter 23.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 45, letter 28.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 47, letter 31, dated London Sep^r 13th 1762.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 56, letter 36. Voltaire's tale is also mentioned in *Correspondence*, vol. II, pp. 281-2, letter 206.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, II, p. 451. For reference to Molière see vol. II, p. 447, letter 348.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, vol. II, p. 162, letter 105.

⁶¹ Ibidem, vol. II, p. 322, letter 246.

⁶² Ibidem, vol. II, p. 345, letter 340.

⁶³ See Ferguson, *Correspondence*, II, p. 110-1, letter 69.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 111-3, letter 70.

Robertson on 9 November.⁶⁵ Some months after his return to England, although he was now absorbed by his usual problems, he wrote to Alexander Carlyle, from Blackheath, on 29 April 1775,⁶⁶ still on the subject of Switzerland and Voltaire.

He told Adam Smith that at Paris, where he had spent a few days, just before getting to Geneva with his pupil, he was questioned about him, "particularly by the Duchess d'Enville, who complained of your French, as she did of mine, but said that before you left Paris she had the happiness to learn your language". The "bad French", it must be noted, was typical of Hume, Smith, Ferguson, who were never able to master French spelling and accents.

To Hume, Robertson, Carlyle, Ferguson wrote longer letters on Swiss landscape and politics, and on the old Voltaire, both of these subjects having struck his imagination. The description of the country, which they contain, needs to be cited in its essentials:

To Hume: "My Journey to this place ... has been extremely pleasant & tho we have lately spent a month in making the Tour of Swisserland I am not yet tired of Wandering. That Country is Curious by Nature by Art & by Politics. In the Aristocratical Cantons all Councils are Secret & the people are well Governed nobody knows how. As for the Democratical... let my Beard grow if the people woud admit me to be one of them".⁶⁷

To Robertson: "All my letters have been dated at Geneva: but I have been settled here only a few days, the summer was spent in the Countrey or in excursions to the Kingdoms Dukedoms & Cantons which touch this little territory on different Sides.... The Silence of Politics here and in the Aristocratical Cantons of Switzerland is amazing: Government does not think itself safe but by keeping out of Sight. Notwithstanding the Democratical Dash which this little Republic has lately received All Deliberations are Secret. Elections never heard of till the day & then made in profound Silence. Even the Doors of the Presbytery are shut, so that all idle expectations of being sometimes amused with Republican debates are intirely dissappointed.... The Countrey is beautiful beyond description. The Lake is equal to the Firth of Forth & the banks somewhat better, with a perpetual View of the Snowy Alps in the heat & bloom of Summer".⁶⁸

To Carlyle:"... from the face of a Snowy Mountain in Savoye higher than all the Mountains in Scotland piled upon one Other & containing more eternal Ice in its recess's than is to [be] found in all Scotland in the hardest Winter. The bottom of this Ice is continually melting in the Valleys like the bottom of a roll of butter placed on end in a frying Pan. It is perpetually Creeping down from the Mountain where fresh Snows continually fall. It hangs in Snotters over Cliffs & Precipices till becomeing too heavy it breaks & with noise louder than thunder makes all the Valleys sing or groan which you please. Masses come down from the mountains sometimes and shake all the Rocks with a force that nothing but an earthquake can imitate & drive the Air out of the narrow Valleys with the force of a hurricane that roots up trees in the opposite hills".⁶⁹

The literary description of the landscape is splendid, but is exceeded, if possible, by the description of the figure of Voltaire.

On this subject Ferguson wrote to Hume:⁷⁰

"I am ... in sight of Voltairs Castle.... I have seen him... He is worn to a shadow but all his Vivacity & his Genius Intire. The last proof he has given of it is a Satire in Dialogue between Pegasus⁷¹ & himself He writes frolicking cards to Lord Chesterfield⁷² & calls him, mon droit honor/

⁶⁵ Ibidem, II, pp. 115-7, letter 72.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 123-5, letter 76.

⁶⁷ To David Hume, Geneva 6 June 1774.

⁶⁸ To William Robertson, Geneva 9 November 1774.

⁶⁹ To Alexander Carlyle, Blackheath 29 April 1775.

⁷⁰ Letter 70, cited above.

⁷¹ Apparently the short satire which begins with the words "Le cheval Pégase fait jaillir une fontaine", in Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Bestermann, vol. 81, p. 175, vol. II, p. 524.

⁷² "[qu]atre vingt et un [ans], salue Mylord de dixneuf ans. S'il n'est pas mort quand Monsieur de Fergusson viendra, il aura l'honneur de le recevoir un petit moment" (NLS, MS 594 no. 2240; printed in Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed.

honorable Seigneur & Signs himself Le Pauvre Diable de Ferney. A Geneva Lady had a dispute with him lately about the Trinity, When she had finished a Speech he Answered

Jusqu'à ce Jour Iris la Trinité
Dans mon Esprit n'a pas fait Fortune
Mais unissant les trois graces en une
Vous confonde[z] mon Incredulité.

He entertained us with a Philippic against France and its Bigottry. Lord Chesterfield said he should go to England, Ah si je n'avez que Soixante & dix Ans Said".

To William Robertson:⁷³ "The principal curiosity however is Voltaire.... You have been told how much he lyes abed & how little he comes to his own Table. He has no certain hours like most old people, is sometimes up early enough & dressed in a full suit laced or Embroidered which cannot be less than thirty year old to judge from the fashion of the Cuffs & the buttons: but is for the most part in his Night Gown a dark Tye Wig & a laced Crimson silk bonnet: His common Salutation is qui veut voir une Ombre. Vous estes bien bon Monsieur-vous venez / voir un Mourant un Cadavre. It is very difficult to Converse with him on this Subject. If you say you are Sorry_____ And pray Sr why should you be sorry Or if you insist that he is wonderfully well & Robust for his Age he complains of the Cholic which is universally understood as a Signal to leave his house.... He likes the Crack of every Whip especially that of Infidelity. He professes a great regard for the Late Lord Chesterfield⁷⁴ & for this Lord of Course so that we can force ourselves upon him at most times; Some time ago after repeated excuses to avoid being seen by a person that wanted to be introduced to him he Answered at last. Si je suis en Vie je serai a vos Ordres, Si je suis mort je vous en demande pardon d'avance. & Pauvre Diable de Ferney. Hubert⁷⁵has lately made a picture of him come out of bed stand[ing] leg & putting on his breeches dictating to his a very fair Specimen of his Way. ... People have a notion that there is something now in agitation between him & the King of Prussia. The latter has had an Officer residing at Voltaires above eighth Months & the most probable conjecture is that this officer has brought Memoires of the late Wars⁷⁶ to be licked up & waits to carry them back again."

To Alexander Carlyle: "...Ferne the seat of that renowned & Pious Apostle Voltaire... at this and every Successive visit [I] encouraged every attempt at Conversation even Jokes against Moses Adam & Eve & the rest of the Prophets till I began to be considered as a person who tho true to my own faith had no ill humour to the freedom of fancy in Others.... he reads little or none his mind exists by Reminiscence & by doing over & over what it has been used to do...."

It is to be noted, in this letter, that Ferguson encouraged, in Voltaire, "every attempt at Conversation even Jokes against Moses Adam & Eve & the rest of the Prophets". This proves even more what has been said above, about the philosophical immanentism of the *Essay*, and its author's substantial irreligiosity, praised by d'Holbach.

After 1776 Ferguson was busy with the *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*,⁷⁷ which made him think of a journey to Italy and to the places associated with his work.⁷⁸

Bestermann, vol. 125, p. 12; but Voltaire, as observed by the editor, apparently confounds Adam Ferguson with Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran, who came to see him in 1759).

⁷³ See letter 72, cited above.

⁷⁴ Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694-1773), 4th Earl of Chesterfield, politician and letter writer.

⁷⁵ Jean Huber (1721-1786), known as Huber-Voltaire, author of several portraits of Voltaire. The one here referred to is 'Le lever de Voltaire', Musée Carnavalet, Paris (see reproduction in T. Bestermann, *Voltaire* (London, 1969), p. 465.

⁷⁶ King Frederick's *Histoire de la Guerre de Sept Ans*.

⁷⁷ See *Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 136, letter 84, to Edward Gibbon, dated March 19th, 1776.

⁷⁸ On this subject see 'Ferguson in Rome', in *Correspondence*, vol. II, pp. 578-82, Appendix L.

In July 1790⁷⁹ we find him complaining of the delay in the translation of the *Roman Republic* into French. In fact, the work appeared in Paris in 1784-91, with the title *Histoire des progrès et de la chute de la république romaine*, vols 1-3, 1784, vols 4-7, 1791, chez Nyon l'aîné, libraire, rue du Jardinnet, quartier Saint André-des Arcs. Volumes 1-3 were translated by Jean Nicholas Démeunier, volumes 4-7 by Jacques Gibelin. In the front-cover to vol. I, the publisher informed the readers that "la traduction de l'*Histoire de la décadence & de la chute de l'Empire Romain*, par M. Gibbon, ayant été imprimée in-8ø, on a cru devoir faire tirer de ce même format quelques exemplaires de l'ouvrage de M. Ferguson, qui doit précéder celui de M. Gibbon".

The French revolution raised Ferguson's most lively interest for politics. The letters of this period are full of references to France, on the part of the old philosopher, impassioned, more than ever, for events and persons.⁸⁰ They reveal a different kind of approach to the events of the neighbouring country, on the part of an observer who well knew what the regime of the privilege represented, and was convinced that the revolution, after all, could only benefit France, but not necessarily Great Britain. The latter enjoyed, in fact, a system of government which, in his judgment, was "one of the happiest constitutions of mankind".⁸¹

Nevertheless, this kind of approach raises historical, rather than cultural problems. The 'last Ferguson', the Ferguson of advancing years, had lost, if not his passion for politics, certainly the animosity of his earlier years, and was now able to consider historical events with a more detached attitude, almost with that of an 'impartial spectator'. This does not necessarily affect his political philosophy, that of the *Essay* and of the *Principles*, which remained unaltered. It needs to be distinguished from the political life, and from the impassioned participation to historical events, proper to the author's youth and maturity.⁸²

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FERGUSON, FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT, SWITZERLAND, VOLTAIRE.

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On the basis of the *Correspondence* of Adam Ferguson, recently published, this essay aims at clarifying the complex problem of the relations between Ferguson and French culture, a subject which has not been fortunate in historiography, at least if compared to the traditional, historiographic topic, of 'Ferguson in Germany'.

The author maintains that France, with its geographical contiguity, must necessarily have exerted a particular influence on Scottish culture, with Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, etc., while we find, in Scotland, later in the century, a relatively poor reception of the works by German authors,

⁷⁹ See letter 269, dated 31 July 1790, to John Macpherson, in *Correspondence*, II, pp. 340-1.

⁸⁰ On this subject see also Ferguson's essay 'Of the French Revolution with its actual and still impending consequences in Europe'. This is one of the 32 essays contained in a bound volume, of the EUL. They have been recently edited by Yasuo Amoh, as *Collection of Essays* (Kioto, 1996).

⁸¹ Ferguson, *Remarks on a pamphlet lately published by Dr Price* (London, 1781), p. 11.

⁸² On this subject see my *Saggio su Ferguson*, op. cit., 'Conclusion: Ferguson 'politico' degli Hannover', pp. 125-33.

Schiller, Herder, Kant, etc. Furthermore French, although a language of Romance origin, for a British scholar was much more understandable than German.

Ferguson's *Essay* was translated into German by Christian Friedrich Jünger in 1768, but in Paris, some months after its publication (February 1767), it was read and praised by Baron d'Holbach, to whom the author had sent a copy. The French 'philosophes', in general, in the *Essay* seem to have particularly approved of the idea of progress, but d'Holbach did not fail to realize that, although it was not an 'enlightened' work, yet the enquiry, philosophically, was consistent with immanentism.

The second part of the essay is dedicated to French Switzerland and to Voltaire. The author transcribes parts of three unpublished letters by Ferguson to David Hume, William Robertson and Alexander Carlyle. They contain, first, a splendid literary description of the Swiss landscape, which particularly struck Ferguson (e.g., the lake of Geneva, which appeared to him similar to the Firth of Forth, or the avalanches in the Alps); secondly, they contain a lively description of Voltaire, at the age of 80, "worn to a shadow but all his Vivacity & his Genius Intire", retaining his well known inclination towards religious satire and his 'Philippics' against French bigotry, etc.

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